

Chuck Kleinhans

lecture and screening

Pacific Film Archives

Oct 13 1987

lecture 1/2 hour

CIRCUS GIRLS

SAPPHO

When Walter Gutman died in 1986, he left an unusual group of experimental films which deserve reassessment as part of the New American Cinema.

CIRCUS GIRLS and SAPPHO represent his fantasies and style.

After a very successful career on Wall Street, Gutman began to hang out with various figures in the New York art world of the 50s. Eventually he became the producer of PULL MY DAISY, and then moved on to making his own films in a similar style--nonsynch sound films with a voice over narration involving the maker and his friends. Financially free of any need to "make it" in the art world, Gutman was an idiosyncratic figure who indulged his fantasies of large, muscular women in films such as CIRCUS GIRLS. A blatant example of the the "male gaze" in film, the work comically deconstructs its sexism by clearly marking its maker's presence.

SAPPHO, made with Jessie Holladay Duane, is part home movie travelogue showing the Greek isle of Lesbos and part a meandering reflection on the poet of antiquity and the power of her verse for a modern audience. Against the contemporary dominance of hard edge minimalism, smart ass sophistication, and postmod irony, Gutman reminds us that amused sincerity and casual storytelling are also viable experimental modes.

Film and video maker Chuck Kleinhans co-edits JUMP CUT and teaches at Northwestern University.

Kleinhans on Gutman